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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [ECON](#) [UNGA](#) [ETRD](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PY](#)
SUBJECT: NEW PARAGUAYAN FOREIGN MINISTER GETS DOWN TO
BUSINESS WITH THE AMBASSADOR

REF: ASUNCION 862

Classified By: AMB JAMES C. CASON: REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Cason met August 25 with Paraguay,s new Foreign Minister, Ruben Ramirez Lezcano Among the topics were discussed access to U.S. markets, visa reciprocity, Cuban refugees, U.S. military exercises and the upcoming UNGA meeting. President Duarte and FM Ramirez will both attend the UNGA. Ramirez (a career diplomat and most recently the MFA,s Vice Minister for Economic Affairs and Integration) demonstrated a refreshingly direct and constructive style in seeking to cut through a number of bilateral issues left unresolved during his predecessor's tenure. ACTION REQUEST: See para 9. END SUMMARY.

Expanding Access to U.S. Markets is a GOP Priority

12. (C) Ambassador called on new Foreign Minister Ruben Ramirez Lezcano August 25. Ramirez, who had been sworn in only on the 22nd, began the meeting by telling the Ambassador that one of Paraguay,s top priorities is access to U.S. markets. He further stated that this was very important to President Duarte and asked for a positive sign and/or message from the USG regarding commerce.

13. (C) Ramirez asked what Uruguay was doing regarding a trade agreement. The Ambassador replied that Uruguay was holding internal discussions about how best to deepen its trade relations with the U.S. but that it was not yet clear to the USG how negotiations would devolve. The Ambassador also pointed out that the expiration of Trade Promotion Authority in 2007 complicates efforts to enter into trade negotiations with new partners.

14. (C) The Ambassador told Ramirez that it was important that Paraguay take advantage of current marketing opportunities in the U.S. For example, it might consider assigning an agricultural attach to the U.S. to liaise with counterparts in Washington to move forward the Sanitary-Phytosanitary approval process for eventual Paraguayan exports of beef to the US. The Ambassador similarly noted the potential of stevia (also known as Ka,a he,e), which is a noncaloric herb native to Paraguay that has been used as a sweetener for many years). The Ambassador informed the FM that U.S. demand for Stevia is much greater than available supply and that Paraguay needs to find a way to first increase production. Stevia is sold as a supplement all over the U.S., and the Ambassador told Ramirez of recent U.S investor interest in marketing stevia in the US

as a sweetener for diabetics. These steps could be taken now, without needing to pursue approval for the use of stevia as a food additive.

Victory on Visas

¶5. (C) After a four-year long campaign with the GOP to issue reciprocal visas to American citizens the new Foreign Minister told the Ambassador that he recognized the need to establish reciprocity. Ramirez further stated that a circular will be sent out immediately from the Ministry of Foreign Relations to all Paraguayan Consulates instructing Consular officers to issue all AmCits visas to the validity of their passports. Paraguay will no longer issue one-entry 3-month visas for a \$45.00 fee. All visas will cost \$65.00 and all visas will be for multiple entries. The Minister asked the Ambassador for U.S. Consul's collaboration to assist his Ministry to brainstorm/develop a new system for visas or other documents to facilitate entry into Paraguay, perhaps an internet based document that would preclude the need for an applicant to appear in person at an Embassy.

Cuba and Cuban Refugees

¶6. (C) The Foreign Minister asked for and Ambassador provided U.S. views on developments in Cuba (i.e. Castro,s illness), and several transitional or succession scenarios. The Ambassador told Ramirez that former Paraguayan Foreign Minister Leila Rachid had not responded to his request for Paraguay to take Cuban refugees from Guantanamo. The Ambassador was informed that the request had to go through the Refugee Commission but Ramirez promised to follow-up and respond directly to the Ambassador. (COMMENT: The Minister appeared favorably disposed to the request. END COMMENT.)

MFA Skittish about Military Exercises Agreement

¶7. (C) The Ambassador advised that the U.S. needs a decision soonest regarding whether the Executive Branch plans to ask Congress to approve the proposed CY07 military exercise program. This represents a high priority to the USG. Ramirez said that the GOP is having difficulty in granting immunity to U.S. participants in writing and they are looking for ways to artfully address this issue in our agreement. Ambassador Cason said that most agreements with other countries grant our soldiers Administrative and Technical (A&T) status. Ramirez explained that the MFA is skittish about Brazilian, Argentine and local opposition to a renewed exercise program. The trick will be to find wording that provides A&T status in a way that critics cannot use it to say the GOP has given us &impunity.8 The Ambassador said his sense is that the Paraguayan Congress will authorize a new round of exercises, so we need to get &wordsmithing8 done ASAP to get the accords to Congress.

U.N. General Assembly

¶8. (C) Both President Duarte and the Foreign Minister will attend the upcoming UNGA. We asked for the GOP to forward a list of attendees soonest. The Ambassador suggested that the FM also meet with &Friends of Paraguay8 in Congress.

¶9. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Ramirez mentioned that he will be in Washington after the UNGA and requested a meeting, if possible, with Secretary Rice. The Ambassador said we would do everything possible; he noted, however, she may not be available. The Ambassador requests that the new FM be afforded a meeting with as senior a USG representative as possible (Under Secretary or a Deputy Secretary). The FM would be willing to visit Washington at a later date to accommodate scheduling with senior officials. Please advise. END ACTION REQUEST.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Foreign Minister Ramirez appears much more decisive than his predecessor, and told a group that included the Economic Counselor on his first day in office that he bases his decisions on reason and not on emotion. Ramirez holds an MBA from UCLA and was Paraguay,s Consul

General in Los Angeles. Post has reason to expect him to be more straightforward and focused as an interlocutor advocating GOP interests than was his predecessor. END COMMENT.

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